

THE BOWLING GREEN OF THE "CROWN"

BEING MEMOIRS OF THE ADVENTURES OF JOHN MARVEL, A SERVANT OF HIS LATE MAJESTY KING CHARLES I. IN THE YEARS 1642-3: WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

EDITED IN MODERN ENGLISH BY

CHAPTER I.

THE BOWLING GREEN OF THE "CROWN."

He that has fished the Mure, forsaking her gentle pipe to follow the drum and trumpet, shall fruitlessly beseege her again when the time comes to sit at home and write down his adventures. "His revenge, as I am extremely sensible; and methinks she is the harder to me, upon reflection how she came to being her life long servant, as you are to being."

"Was on Nov. 29, 1642—a clear, frosty day—that the king, with the Prince of Wales (nearly recovered of the measles), the Princes Rupert and Maurice, and a great company of lords and gentlemen, horse and foot, came down to the Corn market, in Oxford, at that time, and may begin my history at 3 o'clock on the same afternoon, when going (as my custom was) to Mr. Rob Drury for my fencing lesson, I found his lodgings empty. They stood at the corner of Ship street, as you turn into the Corn market—a low wainscoted chamber, ill lighted but commodious. "He is off to see the show," thought I as I looked about me; and, finding an easy cushion in the window, sat down to await the coming of the king, who I had heard had been in the city all day with the scholars' troop in Magdalen college grove, and in despite of the open lattice, I fell sound asleep.

It must have been an hour after that I awoke with a chill in my stomach, and was stretching out a hand to pull the window close, but suddenly sat down again and fell to watching instead.

The window looked down, at the height of ten feet or so, upon a bowling green at the back of the "Crown Tavern," by John Davenant, in the Corn market, and across it to a rambling wing of the same inn; the fourth side—that to my left—being but an old wall, with a broad sycamore growing against it. "Was already twilight; and in the darkness house, over the green, was now one case of the green, with a few stragglers, and within a company of noisy drinkers round a table. They were gaming, as was easily told by their clucking of the dice and frequent oaths; and among the bellow of some tipsy chorus would come across. "Twas one of these catches, I think, that I heard only just now my eyes were bent, not towards the fingers, but to the tall lawn between us. The sycamore, I have hinted, was a broad tree, and must, in summer, have borne a goodly load of leaves; but now, in November, these were strewn thick over the green, and nothing left but stiff, naked boughs. Beneath it lay a cracked bowl or two on the lawn turf, and against the trunk a garden bench rested, I suppose for the convenience of the players. On this man was now seated.

He was reading in a little book, and this first I noticed. I had been told that a man should read print at this time of year, if he had a mind to try, should choose a cold bowling green for his purpose. Yet he seemed to study his volume very attentively, but with a sharp look, now and then, towards the lighted window, as if the revelers disturbed him. His back was partly turned to me, and what with this and the growing dusk I could but make a guess at his face, but a plenty of silver hair fell over his fur collar, and his shoulders were bent a great deal. I judged him between fifty and sixty. For the rest, he wore a dark, simple suit, very straight cut, with an amply furled cloak and a hat rather tall, after the fashion of the last reign.

Now, why the man's behavior so engaged me, I don't know; but at the end of half an hour I was still watching him. By this time it was dark, bitter cold, and his pretense to read mere fondness; yet he persevered, though with longer glances at the casement above, where the din at times was fit to wake the dead.

And now one of the diceers sat his chair with a curse, and gets on his feet. Looking up I saw his features for a moment—a slight, shaggy brow, a pair of eyes, now and then, to the casement, pushes it open for fresh air. He was one that till now had sat in full view—a tall bulky, with a gross, pimpled nose—and led the catches in a bull's voice. The rest of the players paid no heed to his going, and he went on his way, as if he were alone, as he leaned out, drawing in the cold breath.

During the late racket I had forgot for a while my friend under the sycamore, but now, looking that way, to my astonishment I saw him risen from his bench and stealing across to the house opposite, as if he were going to shut the door, and then, as if he were for keeping all the way to the dark shadow of the wall, and, besides, had a curious trailing motion with his left foot, as though the ankle of it had been wrung or badly hurt.

As soon as he was come beneath the window he stopped and called softly, "Hiss!"

The bulky gave a start and looked down. I could tell by this motion he did not look to find any one in the bowling green at that hour. Indeed, he had been watching the shaft of light thrown past him by the room behind, and now moved so as to let it fall on the man that addressed him.

The other stands close under the window, as if to avoid this, and calls again.

"Hiss!" says he, and beckons with a finger. The man at the window still held his tongue, (I suppose because those in the room would hear him if he spoke), and so for a while the two men studied one another in silence, as if considering their next moves.

After a bit, however, the bulky lifted a hand, and, looking back into the lighted room, walks up to the players, speaks a word or two and disappears.

I sat up on the window seat, where till now I had been crouching for fear the shaft of light should betray me, and presently as I was expecting to hear a knock at the back porch, gently lifted, and spied the heavy form of the bulky coming softly over the grass.

Now, I would not have my readers prejudiced, and so may tell them that this was the first time in my life that I had played the eavesdropper. This I did so now I can never be glad enough, so that, at a rhetoric lecture, our president—Dr. Ralph Kettle—took me by the ears before the whole class. He was the fiercer upon me as being older than the gross of my fellow scholars, and (as he thought) more restless under discipline. "A tutored addressee," he would say, "is a fair game before me," and had his hour glass enlarged to point the moral for us. But even a rhetoric lecture must have an end, and so, losing my gown to the porter, I set off at last for Magdalen Bridge, where the new barriado was building, along the Phisic Garden, in front of East Gate.

The day was dull and lowering, though my wife was too busy to heed the sky; but scarcely was I past the small gate in the city wall when a brisk shower of hail and sleet drove me to shelter in the big market (or Frochochum) before the Divinity school. 'Tis an ample vaulted passage, as I dare say you know; and here I found a great company of people already driven by the same cause.

To describe them fully would be necessary to relate the whole state of our city in those

disturbed times, which I have neither wit nor time for. But here, today, along with many doctors and scholars, were waiting courtiers, troopers, mountebanks, cut purses, astrologers, rogues and gamblers, together with many of the first ladies and gentlemen of England, as the Prince Maurice, the Lords Andover, Digby and Colepepper, my Lady Thynne, Mistress Fanshawe, Mr. Secretary Nicholas, the famous Duke of Buckingham, and with my Lord Falkland (whose boots were splashed with mud, he having ridden over from his house at Great Tew), and many such, all mixed in this incredible throng. Mistress Fanshawe, as I remember, was playing on a lute, which she carried always slung about her shoulders; and she, besides her, a fellow impudently puffing his specific against the morbus campestis, which already had begun to invade us.

"Who'll buy?" he was bawling. "Tis from the receipt of a famous Italian, and never yet failed man, woman nor child, who has been cleared of the disease; the best part of it got muscadine, and has virtue against the plague, snailpox or surfeits!"

I was standing before this jackanapes, when I heard a stir in the crowd behind me, and another calling, "Who'll buy? Who'll buy?" Turning, I saw a young man, very gayly dressed, moving quickly about at the far end of the Pig market, and behind him an old lackey, bent double with the weight of two great baskets that he carried. The baskets were piled with books, clothes, gewgaws of all kinds, and the young gentleman that hawked his wares himself. "What d'ye lack?" he kept shouting, and would stop to unfold his merchandise, holding up now a book and now a silk doublet, and running over their merits like any huckster—but with the merriest conceit in the world.

And yet 'twas not this that sent my heart flying into my mouth at the sight of him. For by his curls and womanish face, no less than the amber cloak with the black bars, I knew him at once for the same I had seen yesterday among the diceers.

As I stood there, drawn this way and that by many reflections, he worked his way through the press, selling here and there a trifle from his baskets, and at length came to a halt in front of me.

"Ha!" he cried, pulling off his plumed hat and bowing low, "a scholar, I perceive. Let me serve you, sir. Here's that 'History of Saint George,' and he picked out a thin brown quarto and held it up; "written by Master Peter Heylin; a ripe book, they tell me (though, to be sure, I never read beyond the title), and the price a poor two shillings."

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"Now, all this while I have been coming with you, as I put my hand in my pocket, and drew out the shillings, I said very slowly (but softly, so that the lackey might not hear), looking him in the eyes:

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